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Principles of Child Care

5.7. Underlying the practice of caring for children are certain core values about the human body which Badaga encapsulate in a few proverbs and can sometimes be persuaded to talk about. What some of these proverbs point to is a need to accept human diversity, and even deformity. One asks rhetorically, "Will all begotten children be real children?" And another proverb makes the same comment in reference to dissimilarities between siblings: "The stomach that has given birth to various people is one; those people are of different sense and different complexion." Similarly, "Are there five even fingers ?" Deformities in children are not of course welcomed—"It is bad if you have a lame child; it is bad if you see a blind man"—yet the individual should not feel embarrassed about a defect: "After the boils have formed, what if you feel shy and repugnant about them ?" Chronic illness also has to be tolerated in relatives and treated: "Even if she coughs she is our woman; even if she looks thin she is a grander woman."

Several proverbs reflect a concern with that hardy anthropological question, the relative strength and influence of nurture and of nature in the individual's personality: "Even if one has forgotten one's own begotten children, one won't forget learnt [bad] habits;" the latter are more important than inborn senses. Indeed, some people would go blind rather than give up a bad habit: "Even if your eyes become black a learnt [bad] habit won't disappear." In direct contrast, though, "Inborn habits won't go away even if you burn a man." Badagas believe that inborn habits (*huttu buddi*) are permanent, whereas learnt ones (*katta buddi*) are not.

A number of proverbs relate to the family relationships that involve children, and the way youngesters should be brought up. A certain firmness is counseled: "Children should be brought up under control, and a disobedient wife should have been sent back home." Similarly, "It is said, if the children are to be good, the mother should be good enough [herself]". Badagas believe that children acquire their qualities from the mother. Even so, "That woman will not know the nature of the girl she gave birth to." Kindness and forgiveness are valued in dealing with children. Thus, "If we caress the head of an orphan boy, our own children will grow up of their own accord" (Metz 1864: 94); "Will a child die from the stripes of a mother ?" (Metz 1864: 97); "Cats and

saying anything." The man remained quiet. Then the exorcist rubbed his hand around the plate of rice, and while staring at the woman said some spells. Next he told her to come back to her own seat, and she did. Then he again told the ghost it was past 0800 hrs. and the ghost had not yet left. It replied that it would go if it were given music, hymn-singing and a picture of Murugan. Then, on a relative's suggestion, the proceedings were postponed. That evening they held a *pu:ja* in one of the houses, with this same exorcist in charge. He gave a small religious picture to the ghost, and it went away—if indeed it was ever there!

Other Mental Disturbances

8.7. Cases of insanity are rarely observed in Badaga villages, not because of their infrequency but because the victims are usually killed off by their relatives with an over-dose of opium hidden in some food. In 1970 a madman hobbled with chains could however be seen in one village, but this was very unusual. Insanity is thought to be caused by a demoness, *Ka:teri pe:* who possesses a man, takes his food from him, will not leave him, and ultimately brings exhaustion by not letting him rest properly.

8.8. Witchcraft accusations are common in many parts of India (Epstein 1959), but among the Badagas this kind of paranoid behaviour does not occur *within* the community. Witchcraft is nonetheless present, but it is only the Kurumba and Irula sorcerers and occasional Todas (Rivers 1906: 262; Francis 1908: 144) whom Badagas accuse of it. This displacement of anxiety onto members of another tribe probably helps reduce it effectively. In one recent case a newly married man was apparently experiencing sexual frustrations with his wife; at any rate, he claimed that very often as he slept with his wife at night in a room off the veranda a Kurumba came, separated the two, and built a low brick wall in the bed between them. Such a thing could occur, it was believed, because the Kurumbas had the power to open a bolted door from the outside. The only known way to curtail a Kurumba's powers is to either knock out one of his teeth or cut off his hair (and probably burn it). Important in the containment of witchcraft is the fact that each cluster of Badaga villages appoints a Kurumba sorcerer to protect those Badagas from the sorcery of his fellow tribesmen. His concern for the welfare of his Badaga hosts is expressed symbolically by the key role he plays